

Editorial...

A Roundabout Solution to an Obvious Traffic Problem

Abutter concerns about the state's proposal to redesign the Congress-Lincoln St. intersection may be understandable, but the Town should think twice before rejecting this plan.

Duxbury has an obvious problem at the juncture of Congress and Lincoln Streets. It is one of the top accident-risk intersections among roads maintained by the state, and if traffic statistics aren't convincing, anyone who regularly drives through it can attest to the feeling that you are taking your life into your own hands. Town committees have complained about it for years. The police department complains about it, the public works department complains about it, and the people who live alongside the intersection complain about it.

If everyone agrees that the problem is serious, why the opposition to a state-financed solution that's just waiting for a green light from the Board of Selectmen?

One abutter stands to lose land in the deal, since constructing the proposed "round about" requires a nominal amount of land takings to create an area adequate for the project. To the homeowner, this is no small sacrifice. It may mean a loss of property value. It definitely means a loss of yard area. It could bring passing cars closer to his house. If there is an accident, it could bring the collision right into his driveway.

Other abutters are nervous that the plan won't work. They don't like the current situation, but the relatively untested roundabout that is supposed to slow traffic moving through an intersection is leaving people feeling as though Duxbury is a guinea pig.

Well, by U.S. standards, that is true. Americans like traffic lights. State highway officials and our own public works director, Wally Tonaszuck, say that in Europe, the roundabout is a common engineering design solution to intersections like Congress and Lincoln. But we aren't Europe, and we've never seen one of these "traffic slowing" systems. Furthermore, we don't trust what public officials tell us. We demand that they fix our problems, and then criticize their solutions.

Duxbury shouldn't take every state offer that comes along. State interests aren't necessarily synonymous with the Town's. However, the roundabout seems to provide a solution and no one has come up with a better one. At some point, the people with money to design and build a reasonable alternative will take their funds to some other community that's begging or help—and needs it.

If highway authorities genuinely believe a traffic light will make things worse, they aren't going to install one just because local residents ask for it. And if the Town isn't willing to cooperate, one has to wonder about the fate of the Duxbury-Marshfield petition to close Lincoln St. to heavy truck traffic. To the folks who hold the purse strings for a likely solution to a long-standing road problem, does Duxbury look very reasonable right now?

The fact is that the abutter whose acreage is directly affected by the state's plan has other remedies available.

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If he takes issue with what the Commonwealth is willing to pay to take some of his property, he has avenues to appeal through the courts. Although we sympathize with his concerns, the Selectmen cannot judge this project based solely—or even primarily—on the impact on one resident. They have to analyze the state's plan for broader public benefits, and if they think the benefits aren't really there, then the plan is doomed.

But if the Selectmen feel that on balance, the Lincoln-Congress roundabout promises to slow traffic and reduce the number of accidents, they should give their symbolic green light and get this show on the road. Highway design may be complicated, but it isn't rocket science.